

The best cities

What's the healthiest town in the nation?

The best for jobs?

Finding a mate? For the fifth year, we ran the numbers. Did your town make the map?

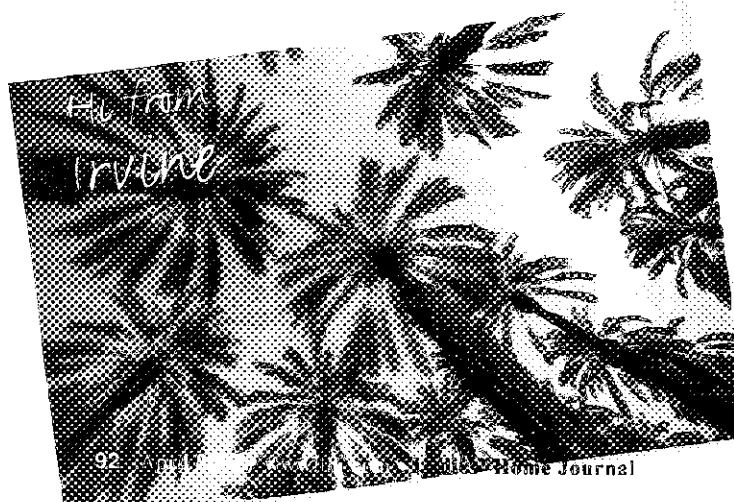
**Produced by
Margot Gilman**

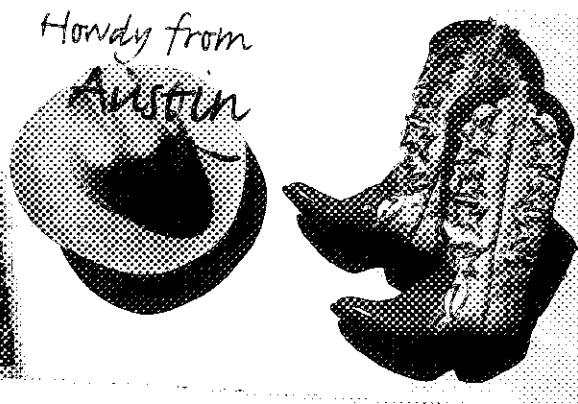
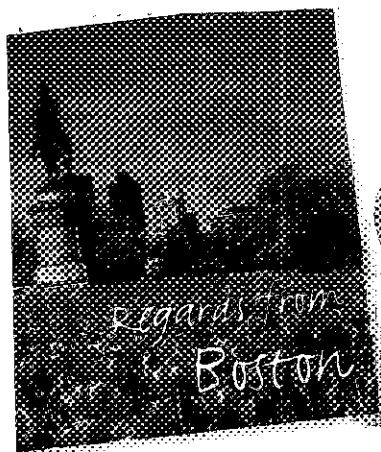
Beyond succulent seafood and picturesque harbors, the waterfront cities of Virginia Beach, Boston and Honolulu now share another distinction: They all make a starring appearance (in first, second and third places, respectively) on our yearly list of America's Ten Best Cities for Women.

They're also sizable, reflecting a refinement we made in this, our fifth annual survey of the country's 200 largest towns. Recognizing that big and small cities differ widely in the severity of their crime and traffic headaches, their cultural riches and financial resources, we decided it would be more accurate and useful to pick overall winners in two classes this year. For 2002, you'll see a list of

10 heavyweight champs with populations over 300,000, and another honor roll of 10 smaller winners with populations under 300,000. (On charts for single categories on the following five pages, we ranked the best and worst, regardless of size. And we've profiled the top five cities on each list.)

As always, we compared our towns according to the qualities that women say they value most. Once again, with the help of the trend trackers at Fast Forward, a demographic consulting firm in Portland, Oregon, we looked at crime rates, educational achievements, child-care quality and the presence of women in local government, plus a potpourri of lifestyle factors that can stress or soothe daily existence, from





for women 2002

commuting times and divorce rates to the probability of bad hair days based on weather conditions. We expanded the data in our health-care coverage, considering how likely locals were to get a dental checkup, develop asthma, contract a cold, or suffer from high blood pressure or high cholesterol levels.

We also altered our calculations to acknowledge today's tough new realities. With the national economy struggling to emerge from recession, we gave extra emphasis to the availability of well-paying jobs and business opportunities for women.

Finally, we created an important new yardstick to measure hometown security. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, many city governments have confronted the need to better protect their citizens during dire emergencies, and we

applaud their preparedness.

Our Champion Cities for 2002 come from all regions of the U.S. And while smaller cities racked up more perfect scores in everything from child care to jobs, bigger places did well, too, scoring high for lifestyle, government and security.

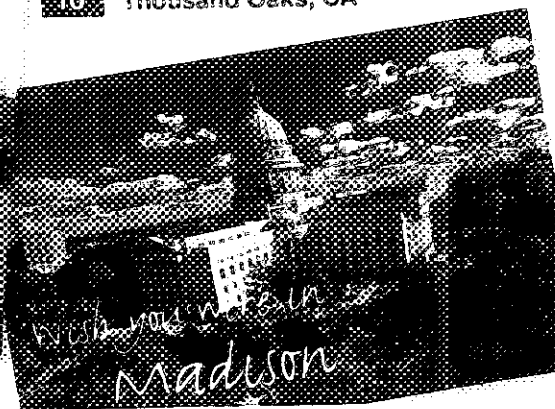
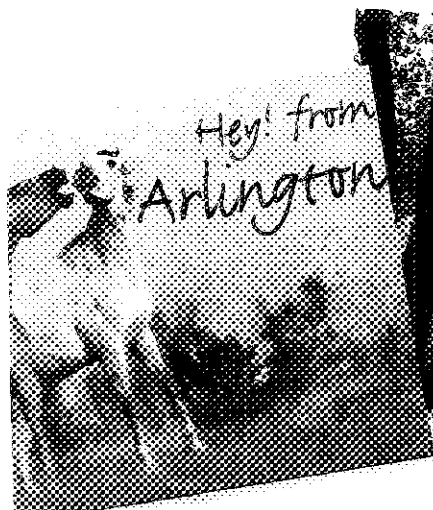
What makes a city livable depends, of course, on the needs of any given woman at any given time. For many of us in the closing days of 2001, what counted most were the consolations of those we knew and loved—our families, friends and neighbors. When the world explodes around you, there really is no place like home. Watching New Yorkers rally to their flawed-but-magnificent city, perhaps we came to cherish our own communities even more, whatever their shortcomings might be. —Lynn Langway

TOP 10 BIG CITIES (more than 300K people)

- 1 Virginia Beach, VA
- 2 Boston, MA
- 3 Honolulu, HI
- 4 Austin, TX
- 5 Arlington, TX
- 6 Anaheim, CA
- 7 Minneapolis, MN
- 8 Colorado Springs, CO
- 9 San Diego, CA
- 10 Omaha, NE

TOP 10 SMALL CITIES (fewer than 300K people)

- 1 Madison, WI
- 2 Alexandria, VA
- 3 Ann Arbor, MI
- 4 Stamford, CT
- 5 Irvine, CA
- 6 Burlington, VT
- 7 Huntington Beach, CA
- 8 Santa Clarita, CA
- 9 Plano, TX
- 10 Thousand Oaks, CA



SPECIAL REPORT

Virginia Beach: number-

VIRGINIA

BEACH, VA Virginia Beach

is a well-rounded gold medalist, with a top score for security, plus high grades for crime, economy and government. The booming Navy town also ranks in the top quarter for exercise, general health and abundant bachelors. And it's the least stressful big city in the U.S.

Point of Pride: Hometown to Rudy Boesch, the crusty-but-cute Navy Seal from the first "Survivor."

You probably think of Virginia Beach, Virginia, as a boardwalk town crammed with tasteless T-shirt shops and enough bars to keep the spring-break crowds happy. But don't be fooled: If you peel away the relatively tiny downtown strip, what's left is a thriving, family-friendly community that's diverse, welcoming and, in spots, take-your-breath-away gorgeous. Virginia's largest city is full of winding roads that give way to unexpected water views—a marsh here, a river there, sudden glimpses of the Chesapeake Bay.

My fact-finding mission was to try our number-one city on for size. I brought my New York kids along for the inspection tour. (For a while, Virginia Beach and Boston were teetering neck and neck in the rankings; I was secretly hoping for Beantown to win.) Almost from the first, it's clear that Virginia Beach is an easy place to be a newcomer. Churches post signs welcoming all. The school system, the state's biggest, runs a well-organized Web site and outreach program to settle out-of-towners quickly. And housing in the area is abundant—from tidy condos to beachfront mansions.

Our first step in exploring the city:

The best cities for ...

The Top 10 lists change as we focus on individual categories. Each one is based on a number of measures—in health, for instance, we looked at behavior (smoking, exercising, getting Pap smears) as well as at health-care accessibility and disease incidence.

Low crime

1. Stamford, CT
2. Sterling Heights, MI
3. Sunnyvale, CA
4. Huntington Beach, CA
5. Orange, CA
6. Fremont, CA
7. Irvine, CA
8. Fullerton, CA
9. Thousand Oaks, CA
10. Santa Clarita, CA

Health

1. Birmingham, AL
2. Tucson, AZ
3. Baton Rouge, LA
4. Scottsdale, AZ
5. Salt Lake City, UT
6. Tempe, AZ
7. Macon, GA
8. Columbia, SC
9. Brownsville, TX
10. Phoenix, AZ

Education

1. Alexandria, VA
2. Yonkers, NY
3. Madison, WI
4. Stamford, CT
5. Ann Arbor, MI
6. Washington, DC
7. Boston, MA
8. Burlington, VT
9. Overland Park, KS
10. Durham, NC

Government

1. Minneapolis, MN
2. San Bernardino, CA
3. Salinas, CA
4. Escondido, CA
5. Hollywood, FL
6. Santa Clarita, CA
7. Virginia Beach, VA
8. Madison, WI
9. Orlando, FL
10. Huntington Beach, CA

Economy

1. Madison, WI
2. Sioux Falls, SD
3. Fargo, ND
4. Irvine, CA
5. Overland Park, KS
6. Independence, MO
7. Plano, TX
8. Mesquite, TX
9. Garland, TX
10. Burlington, VT

Jobs

1. Burlington, VT
2. Portland, ME
3. Vallejo, CA
4. Providence, RI
5. Eugene, OR
6. Riverside, CA
7. Huntington Beach, CA
8. Springfield, MA
9. Moreno Valley, CA
10. Sioux Falls, SD

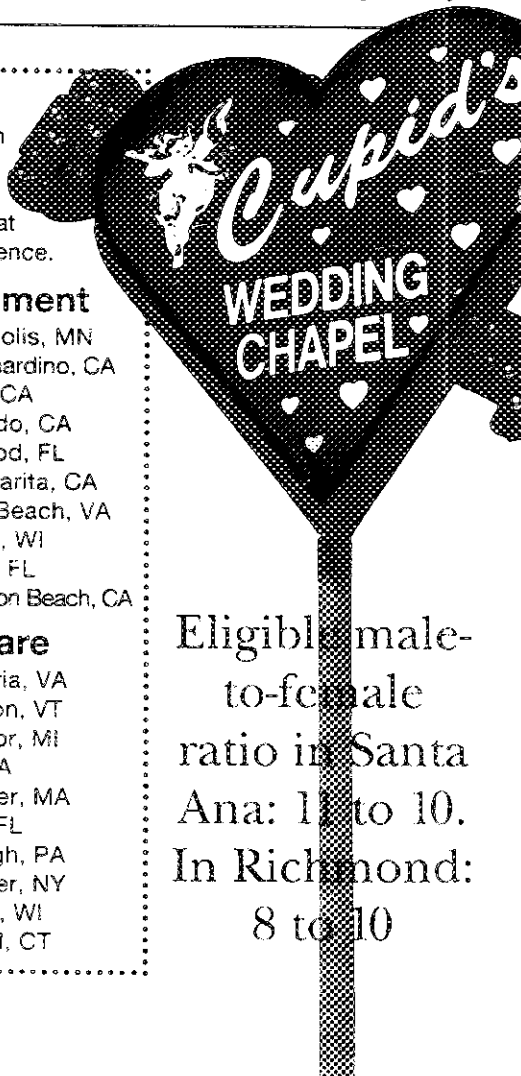
Lifestyle

1. Abilene, TX
2. Fargo, ND
3. Plano, TX
4. Yonkers, NY
5. Chesapeake, VA
6. El Monte, CA
7. Alexandria, VA
8. Santa Ana, CA
9. Boston, MA
10. Hampton, VA

Child care

1. Alexandria, VA
2. Burlington, VT
3. Ann Arbor, MI
4. Irvine, CA
5. Worcester, MA
6. Tampa, FL
7. Pittsburgh, PA
8. Rochester, NY
9. Madison, WI
10. Hartford, CT

Eligible male-to-female ratio in Santa Ana: 11 to 10. In Richmond: 8 to 10



one for families

to check out a place to live, as if we were really moving here. We settle on sizing up homes in the \$225,000 range—a major-city midpoint. Back home in Queens, New York, the pickings would have been slim—here, I'm given 126 listings that have my required three bedrooms, two baths. My favorite: a brand-new house, sided with yellow clapboard and set in a grove of pine trees, across the street from a playground and a few blocks from the ocean. The kids race around the backyard, their feet cushioned by the ever-present pine needles that blanket the city.

Next, we stop and watch a soccer team practice at a middle school

with sprawling grounds, catch a budget matinee at a multiplex and count every fast-food joint we see. "Yup," says my 10-year-old daughter. "I could live here."

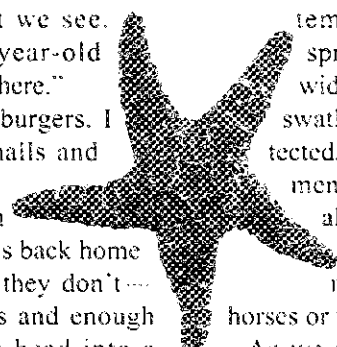
If my kids live for burgers, I set my compass by malls and supermarkets. We find the biggest mall, which has everything the malls back home have and two things they don't—manageable crowds and enough parking. Next, we head into a Food Lion—entire Manhattan neighborhoods could fit in the frozen-food aisle. We have trouble locating plastic spoons for our yogurt. Not one, but *two* stockboys come to our aid. "You should move

down here," the checkout guy, a transplant from Michigan, tells us. "The people are so friendly."

But Virginia Beach's magic, of course, isn't in its malls, supermarkets, schools or housing. It's what tempts all those kids on spring break: 28 miles of wide, ocean beaches. Large swaths of coastline are protected, not only from development and boom boxes, but also from motor vehicles. A sign even warns us not to feed the wild horses or the deer.

As we pull away, my son entrusts me with the two sand dollars he's found, and I understand why European explorers came to Virginia long before chilly Massachusetts. And I think, Who needs Boston?

—Sarah Mahoney



Male call

Maybe it's time for a new wave of songs about all those California boys. When we checked out cities where single men over age 18 outnumber single women, we discovered that 14 of the 20 biggest bachelorvilles were in the Golden State. That's a major shift from the last time we looked five years ago, when military meccas like Norfolk and Virginia Beach, Virginia, ruled. We saw some repeaters—such as Anchorage, Alaska, and Las Vegas—but lots of new man magnets. Cautionary note: Since the tech boom has now busted in several of these hot spots, you might want to hold off the moving vans.



MADISON, WI Called "Mad City" by some despite its next-to-last-place stress-index finish. Why worry, when Madison boasts a top economy, plus enviable scores in child care and education? **Notable quote:** A top Republican once described the super-liberal town as "sixty-seven square miles surrounded by reality."



Big bachelorvilles Dating duds

1. Santa Ana, CA
2. Anchorage, AK
3. Reno, NV
4. Oxnard, CA
5. Tempe, AZ
6. Fort Lauderdale, FL
7. Las Vegas, NV
8. El Monte, CA
9. Pomona, CA
10. San Jose, CA

191. New Orleans, LA
192. Louisville, KY
193. Winston-Salem, NC
194. Chattanooga, TN
195. St. Louis, MO
196. Shreveport, LA
197. Birmingham, AL
198. Charleston, WV
199. Macon, GA
200. Richmond, VA

ALEXANDRIA, VA Perched across the Potomac from Washington, D.C., this historic town enjoys all the District's cultural advantages with few of its hassles. Alexandria ranks at the top of our class in education, child care, job growth and lifestyle—and inhabitants report the fewest colds per capita in the U.S. **Unofficial motto:** "The Fun Side of the Potomac."



SPECIAL REPORT

Help wanted

When it comes to the job market, Middle America is going to extremes.

Four Midwestern cities boast the best employment levels in the country—but four others endure some of the worst jobless rates.

Otherwise, the pain of hard times is widely shared around the U.S. Not so for future job growth, where the Sunbelt shines bright: Eight of the boomtowns are in Texas, Florida, Arizona and California.

Highest employment rates*

1. Fargo, ND
2. Madison, WI
3. Sioux Falls, SD
4. Ann Arbor, MI
5. Irvine, CA
6. Huntington Beach, CA
7. Lubbock, TX
8. Portland, ME
9. Stamford, CT
10. Santa Clarita, CA

Best job growth

1. Boise, ID
2. Dallas, TX
3. Plano, TX
4. Tucson, AZ
5. St. Petersburg, FL
6. Irving, TX
7. Alexandria, VA
8. Tampa, FL
9. Garland, TX
10. Oakland, CA

Lowest employment rates

191. Rochester, NY
192. Fresno, CA
193. Rockford, IL
194. Paterson, NJ
195. Miami, FL
196. Cleveland, OH
197. Detroit, MI
198. Gary, IN
199. Newark, NJ
200. Brownsville, TX

Worst job growth

191. Tacoma, WA
192. Savannah, GA
193. New York, NY
194. New Haven, CT
195. Bridgeport, CT
196. Evansville, IN
197. Spokane, WA
198. Peoria, IL
199. Stamford, CT
200. Billings, MT

*ALL DATA FROM BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS FOR OCTOBER 2001



HONOLULU, HI No need to call Hawaii 5-O, Magnum P.I. or a "Baywatch" lifeguard—this tropical metropolis has crime rates under control. Honolulu also scores high on healthy habits, and has one of the lowest ratios of fast-food outlets per capita.

Local Luminaries: Bette Midler, Don Ho, Kelly Preston and John Travolta



BOSTON, MA Beantown boasts the best big-city scores for jobs (85th percentile) and lifestyle (81st), buoyed by world-class culture and the country's fourth-lowest divorce rate. **Never mind the tea party, bring on the green beer:** Boston claims to have inflicted the first St. Patrick's Day celebration on the U.S. in 1737.

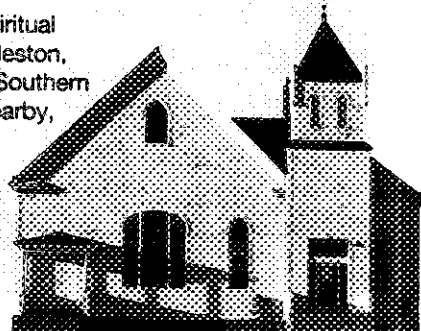
ANN ARBOR, MI Less than an hour from Detroit, this university town earns high grades in several categories, including child care, economy, health, crime and education. Ann Arborites are also fiercely fit, with leading scores for exercise, low cholesterol and dental checkups.



Singular sight: The Naked Mile, a spring race in which runners shed their clothes.

SPIRITUAL CENTERS

Many of us hunger for spiritual solace. The folks of Charleston, West Virginia, and other Southern cities can find comfort nearby, in numerous houses of worship. Those in towns with fewer sanctuaries per capita—such as Las Vegas—may have to seek more devoutly to find a place to pray.



Soulful cities

1. Charleston, WV
2. Abilene, TX
3. Salt Lake City, UT
4. Birmingham, AL
5. Huntsville, AL
6. Knoxville, TN
7. Chattanooga, TN
8. Springfield, MO
9. Sioux Falls, SD
10. Kansas City, KS

Secular spots

191. Garden Grove, CA
192. Huntington Beach, CA
193. Orange, CA
194. Fullerton, CA
195. Irvine, CA
196. Virginia Beach, VA
197. Las Vegas, NV
198. Fort Lauderdale, FL
199. Hollywood, FL
200. Richmond, VA

SPECIAL REPORT

Elastic Waistlands

Blame it on the bratwursts or barbecue. Whatever the cause, there's a stretch of the U.S. midsection where overindulgence—in fatty foods, smoking and other bad behavior—seems to be, well, widespread. Weighing these and other unfit factors—high body-mass index scores, elevated cholesterol, lots of sunburns—we mapped a risky region that runs roughly in cruller shape from Milwaukee to Lubbock. At the other end of the scale, the most health-conscious among us are clustered in Arizona.

Tsk-tsk towns

1. Peoria, IL
2. Springfield, MO
3. Charleston, WV
4. Lubbock, TX
5. Evansville, IN
6. Kansas City, MO
7. Milwaukee, WI
8. Independence, MO
9. Gary, IN
10. Amarillo, TX

Virtue-villes

191. Mesa, AZ
192. Phoenix, AZ
193. Scottsdale, AZ
194. Tempe, AZ
195. Honolulu, HI
196. Alexandria, VA
197. Tucson, AZ
198. Concord, CA
199. Yonkers, NY
200. Salinas, CA

Hometown security

The White House established an Office of Homeland Security last fall in response to terrorist attacks and anthrax threats. But what have our own hometowns done to protect us?

To find out, we asked three questions of city officials. First, we wanted to know whether the city had a terrorism response or prevention plan, or was preparing one. Next, we asked if officials offered antiterrorism training, and finally, what steps their cities had taken since September 11, from hiring more police and firefighters to updating communications equipment. Our survey turned up an honor roll of 13 cities that are the best prepared. But five cities, we found, haven't done much at all.

The hometown security honor roll

(in alphabetical order)

1. Albuquerque, NM
2. Arlington, TX
3. Burlington, VT
4. Charleston, WV
5. Dayton, OH
6. Fort Wayne, IN
7. Indianapolis, IN
8. Irving, TX
9. Laredo, TX
10. New York, NY

11. Orlando, FL
12. Stamford, CT
13. Virginia Beach, VA

Bottom of the class

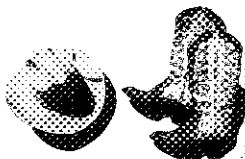
(by descending rank)

196. Sterling Heights, MI
197. Garden Grove, CA
198. Lancaster, CA
199. South Bend, IN
200. Aurora, IL



STAMFORD, CT Small wonder Stamford shines in our lifestyle category, with its well-heeled residents and splendid coastal location. But it also wins high grades for crime, antiterrorism, economy and education—and makes the Beauty Index Top 10.

Wallet watch: At \$109,800, the area had the nation's highest median family income in 2001.



AUSTIN, TX If we gave points for hipness, this techie, artsy, bluesy hot spot in the Texas hills would top our charts. As is, the state capital and university town scores high in child care and education—but also in stress.

Best bumper sticker: "Keep Austin Weird."

IRVINE, CA When the local airport is named for John Wayne, you'd expect a town to be serious about crime-busting, and Irvine scores high in that category. Irvine also rates high in child care and economy, and reports the smallest percentage of smokers.

Official vegetable: Asparagus (Town Web site also lists an Official insect.)



BEAUTY SPOTS

Style centers from Boston to New York City and nearby metropolises ruled this beauty contest, which counts such factors as how local weather affects a woman's skin and hair, and the likelihood that she keeps up with dental checkups. Some smaller towns were also looking good. The eyes of Texas, meanwhile, may want to focus elsewhere.

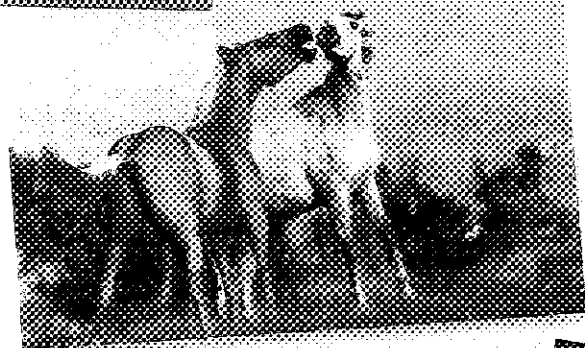
Beautiful finds

1. Anchorage, AK
2. Yonkers, NY
3. Alexandria, VA
4. Boston, MA
5. Salinas, CA
6. New York, NY
7. Ann Arbor, MI
8. Elizabeth, NJ
9. Bridgeport, CT
10. Stamford, CT

Pretty impaired

191. Tampa, FL
192. Charleston, WV
193. Jacksonville, FL
194. Mobile, AL
195. Springfield, IL
196. New Orleans, LA
197. Laredo, TX
198. Corpus Christi, TX
199. Brownsville, TX
200. Beaumont, TX

SPECIAL REPORT



ARLINGTON, TX Midway between Dallas and Fort Worth, Arlington prides itself on a bustling economy, ample jobs and good hometown security—as befits a former workplace of George W. Bush, who used to own the Texas Rangers. And say what you will about Texas-size hairdos, but Arlington ranks among the 20 most coiffure-friendly cities.

Screen gem: “Walker, Texas Ranger” was taped here.

Stress points

Gary, Indiana, is Stressville, U.S.A. The beleaguered industrial city, which comes in dead last on our overall list, ranks number-one on our *agita* index.

To find the most stressful cities, we looked at lifestyle trials (long commutes, high divorce rates), health threats (high blood pressure) and economic anxieties.

Stress centers

1. Gary, IN
2. Dallas, TX
3. San Bernardino, CA
4. Inglewood, CA
5. Seattle, WA
6. Phoenix, AZ
7. Oakland, CA
8. Tacoma, WA
9. Portland, OR
10. San Jose, CA

Tranquil towns

191. Portland, ME
192. Ann Arbor, MI
193. Laredo, TX
194. Huntsville, AL
195. Lubbock, TX
196. Charleston, WV
197. Chesapeake, VA
198. Sioux Falls, SD
199. Madison, WI
200. Fargo, ND

How the rest rank

For more on your town or any of our 200 cities, go to www.lhj.com/bestcities2002

BIG CITIES (population over 300,000)

11. Pittsburgh, PA
12. Toledo, OH
13. Washington, DC
14. Tucson, AZ
15. Columbus, OH
16. Long Beach, CA
17. Santa Ana, CA
18. Mesa, AZ
19. San Jose, CA
20. Charlotte, NC
21. Portland, OR
22. Fort Worth, TX
23. New York, NY
24. San Francisco, CA
25. Seattle, WA
26. Sacramento, CA
27. Los Angeles, CA
28. Kansas City, MO
29. Fresno, CA
30. Denver, CO
31. Tulsa, OK
32. Tampa, FL
33. Milwaukee, WI
34. Atlanta, GA
35. Jacksonville, FL
36. Chicago, IL
37. Cincinnati, OH
38. San Antonio, TX
39. Wichita, KS
40. Las Vegas, NV

41. Phoenix, AZ
42. Oklahoma City, OK
43. Indianapolis, IN
44. Dallas, TX
45. El Paso, TX
46. Nashville-Davidson, TN
47. Albuquerque, NM
48. Houston, TX
49. Philadelphia, PA
50. Oakland, CA
51. Baltimore, MD
52. St. Louis, MO
53. Miami, FL
54. Cleveland, OH
55. Memphis, TN
56. Detroit, MI
57. New Orleans, LA

SMALL CITIES (population under 300,000)

11. Portland, ME
12. Cedar Rapids, IA
13. Fargo, ND
14. Yonkers, NY
15. Fremont, CA
16. Sterling Heights, MI
17. Fullerton, CA
18. Rancho Cucamonga, CA
19. Orange, CA
20. Cheyenne, WY
21. Sioux Falls, SD
22. Lincoln, NE
23. Garland, TX
24. Sunnyvale, CA
25. Hampton, VA
26. Torrance, CA
27. Hartford, CT
28. Boise, ID
29. Des Moines, IA
30. Abilene, TX
31. Worcester, MA
32. New Haven, CT
33. Glendale, CA
34. Lexington-Fayette, KY
35. Chula Vista, CA
36. Bakersfield, CA
37. Escondido, CA
38. Eugene, OR
39. Elizabeth, NJ
40. Paterson, NJ
41. Manchester, NH
42. Anchorage, AK
43. Billings, MT
44. Concord, CA
45. Scottsdale, AZ
46. Waterbury, CT
47. Springfield, MA
48. Tallahassee, FL
49. Providence, RI
50. Chesapeake, VA
51. Springfield, IL
52. Bridgeport, CT

53. Lakewood, CO
54. Mesquite, TX
55. Oceanside, CA
56. Syracuse, NY
57. Moreno Valley, CA
58. Salem, OR
59. Glendale, AZ
60. Columbia, SC
61. Garden Grove, CA
62. Durham, NC
63. Reno, NV
64. Rochester, NY
65. Pasadena, CA
66. Jersey City, NJ
67. Wilmington, DE
68. Newark, NJ
69. Riverside, CA
70. Santa Rosa, CA
71. Grand Rapids, MI
72. Aurora, IL
73. Lansing, MI
74. Overland Park, KS
75. Lancaster, CA
76. Raleigh, NC
77. Vallejo, CA
78. Irving, TX
79. Independence, MO
80. San Bernardino, CA
81. Brownsville, TX
82. Aurora, CO
83. Charleston, WV

84. Hollywood, FL
85. Pomona, CA
86. Lubbock, TX
87. Fort Wayne, IN
88. Richmond, VA
89. Oxnard, CA
90. Springfield, MO
91. Amarillo, TX
92. Buffalo, NY
93. Peoria, IL
94. Topeka, KS
95. Laredo, TX
96. Columbus, GA
97. Modesto, CA
98. Evansville, IN
99. Ontario, CA
100. Corpus Christi, TX
101. Erie, PA
102. Dayton, OH
103. Pasadena, TX
104. Huntsville, AL
105. St. Paul, MN
106. Tempe, AZ
107. Hayward, CA
108. Greensboro, NC
109. Newport News, VA
110. Akron, OH
111. El Monte, CA
112. Winston-Salem, NC
113. Knoxville, TN

114. Orlando, FL
115. Stockton, CA
116. Norfolk, VA
117. Hialeah, FL
118. Warren, MI
119. Salt Lake City, UT
120. Spokane, WA
121. Little Rock, AR
122. Flint, MI
123. Rockford, IL
124. Louisville, KY
125. Allentown, PA
126. Chattanooga, TN
127. Sarnas, CA
128. Inglewood, CA
129. St. Petersburg, FL
130. South Bend, IN
131. Fort Lauderdale, FL
132. Mobile, AL
133. Birmingham, AL
134. Macon, GA
135. Beaumont, TX
136. Tacoma, WA
137. Baton Rouge, LA
138. Montgomery, AL
139. Kansas City, KS
140. Shreveport, LA
141. Savannah, GA
142. Jackson, MS
143. Gary, IN